

The Gospel of Mark

Series Title: Conversations with Scripture

Marcus J. Borg (± \$28)

Morehouse Publishing 2009

Marcus Borg needs no introduction. I can imagine that when the editor of this series wanted to approach a scholar to do a book on Mark, Marcus almost chose himself. And this is a very good introduction on what is generally accepted to be the oldest of the Synoptic Gospels.

This book is part of a series of books with a distinctively Anglican approach (that is explained in the Introduction to the Series, for those wanting to understand what that might mean!) Other books in the series include *Revelation*, *The Parables*, *The Law*, *2 Isaiah* and more.

Borg starts with an autobiographical note and then follows with a general introduction to the Gospel of Mark. This section is of crucial importance for those unfamiliar with the current debate/ issues surrounding the person and message of Jesus. It is concise and informative.

Borg begins with the importance of Mark, and his distinctiveness. Then Borg explains his approach. He describes himself as “a Christian and a mainstream biblical scholar.” (p3) It is from this perspective that he explains some of the main themes of the current debate around Jesus. E.g. Memory and tradition, memory and metaphor, a historical-metaphorical approach, historical context, and Mark’s audience.

For those familiar with Borg’s work, there isn’t much new in this publication. I do believe, however that he aims here to reach a very different audience. After the (key) introductory chapter, he proceeds to explain (chapter by chapter and paragraph by paragraph) how one would interpret the Gospel of Mark in the light of recent scholarship results. This is where I believe the main value of this book lies. It may even be that this book is already in use as a prescribed book for 1st year students in Biblical Studies?

I believe that this book is also aimed at the reader who is still trying to find their way in the current debate. I can imagine the typical reader to be someone that feels comfortable with the main thrust of the current debate in progressive circles (about metaphorical truth, the importance or not of historical facts, etc) but also to be someone who’s still asking questions like: “But if Jesus perhaps didn’t really walk on water, how am I supposed to understand it then?”

The bulk of the book (as mentioned before) is taken up by a paragraph by paragraph exposition of the Gospel (pages 17-108). But there is also a very useful concluding chapter

entitled "Study Questions" (pages 109-133). This could be aimed at students, but could be equally useful to study or discussion groups.

All in all, this is a very useful and welcome addition to the library that is fast building up in progressive theology. It has certainly made me curious to explore some of the other titles in the series. If the standard of this little publication is anything to go by, it will be worth having a look.

Chris Crause, 2010